

THE LOGIC OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE FAILURES

A MONOGRAPH

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This monograph is for the intelligence professionals that are constantly exploring alternatives to mitigate or reduce military intelligence failures with the purpose of providing objective analysis for policymakers/decisionmakers to take action. I am greatly indebted to my husband, Larry, and daughters, Shannon and Megan, for their unconditional love and support throughout this research project.

ABSTRACT

This monograph addresses the research question: *are military intelligence failures inevitable?* If so, what are the causes and effects of intelligence failures and how can these causes and effects be mitigated or minimized in order to contain the degree of ramifications. The desire to explore this research question is twofold: (1) understand the effects of consequences in which military intelligence failures create unfavorable conditions for the conduct of military operations and (2) identify remedies for military intelligence failures.

The methodology for this research consists of a thorough literature review on the characteristics of military intelligence failures as well as lessons learned from historical military intelligence failures, military blunders, or military misfortunes. The Easter Offensive in Vietnam 1972 and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait in 1990 served as case studies. Analysis of available literature was sufficient for making generalizations of the causes and effects of military intelligence failures to provide recommendations on how to mitigate or reduce the variables of military intelligence failures. The purpose is to provide objective analysis for policymakers/decisionmakers to take action.

There is a need to recognize the implications of military intelligence failures in relation to military operations and take aggressive actions in order to eliminate or minimize such failures. The genesis of military intelligence failures is often linked to the interpretation of intelligence and how intelligence is used. That is why there must be emphasis on education and training of intelligence analysts as well as users of intelligence. Intelligence analysis is fundamentally a mental process; therefore, analysts need to know how to better understand, influence, and guide their mental processes. Policymakers/decisionmakers must also recognize their role in guiding the intelligence process in order to obtain objective analysis in time to develop a plan against impending threats.

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CHAPTER 1

THE LOGIC OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE FAILURES

Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.

—Sun Tzu¹

In fact, how can any man say what he should do himself, if he is ignorant what his adversary is about?

—Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini²

Throughout history, the role of intelligence has been vital to national security and the conduct of military operations. Both Sun Tzu's and Antoine Henri de Jomini's observations on the contribution of intelligence during their respective era are timeless and remain valid in the 21st century. Annually, America spends billions of dollars on intelligence operations. The intelligence budget total for fiscal years 1997 and 1998 were 26.6 billion and 26.7 billion, respectively.³ As a result of such high expenditures, policymakers/decisionmakers expect timely; accurate; and relevant intelligence products, including predictive intelligence on threat maneuver, objectives, and courses of action. It

¹ Samuel B. Griffith, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1971), 84.

² Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1986), 268.

³ "CIA Discloses FY 1998 Intelligence Budget Total," p. 1; available from <http://www.fas.org/gp/foia/intel98.html>; Internet; accessed 1/16/01.

is essential for U.S. leadership to have the foreknowledge of impending threats in order to have the time required to devise a plan that could effectively counter such threats.

The U.S. with the existence of a strong intelligence apparatus thus far has been successful in preserving its way of life. America has experienced and survived a number of threats: the struggle for independence, Civil War, German aggression during World War I, German and Japanese aggression during World War II, prospect of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War, Iraqi aggression during the Persian Gulf War, and small scale contingencies in recent years such as Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. The U.S. must continue to have a strong and viable intelligence system in order to support its efforts in neutralizing threats both at the present and in the future.

These threats may derive from adverse political trends that have been witnessed in the Balkans, international terrorism, and/or the potential of a peer competitor in twenty to thirty years. Other threats can come in the form of processes like the proliferation of lethal technologies, emergence of violently-defined ethnic rivalries, costs of environmental pollution, risk of vaccine-resistant plagues, vulnerabilities of interdependent informations links, pressures of population against resources, and gradual loss of control over the economic conditions that determine America's standard of living.⁴

The expectations of perfect or near-perfect intelligence in the 21st century are probably more challenging than ever to satisfy in history. From a historical perspective, the warning time for a strategic surprise against U.S. interests has drastically declined

⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, "Muddling Through? A Strategic Checklist for the United States in the Post-Cold War World," p. 3; available from http://www.isn.ethz.ch/securityforum/Online_Publications/WS4/Gaddis.htm; Internet; accessed 1/8/01.

during the pre-industrial period of months to weeks compared to the present era of days to hours. One reason for this is the technological advancements in mobility, fire power, air power, and combined arms warfare. Prior to the technological-revolution period, it was virtually impossible to detect a rapid movement of large troop formations over long distances in a short period of time. Collection on adversary's capabilities and offensive intent was relatively easy with the slow pace of mobilization as well as large troop concentration and movement. Consequently, a decisionmaker had time to plan for a counterstrike at a time and place of his choosing. Carl Von Clausewitz recognized the dynamics of surprise in the 17th and 18th centuries as having more of a theoretical value than practical value.

Basically surprise is a tactical device, simply because in tactics time and space are limited in scale. Therefore in strategy surprise becomes more feasible the closer it occurs to the tactical realm, and more difficult, the more it approaches the higher levels of policy. Preparations for war usually take months. Concentrating troops at their main assembly points generally requires the installation of supply dumps and depots, as well as considerable troop movements, whose purpose can be guessed soon enough. It is very rare therefore that one state surprises another, either by an attack or by preparations for war.⁵

Another reason is the existence of asymmetric foes who seek to negate America's technological superiority. Osama bin Laden, a Saudi millionaire who is in charge of a terrorist conspiracy, has been allegedly linked to a number of terrorist acts against U.S. targets. He has been accused of training Somalis who killed eighteen U.S. soldiers in Somalia in 1993, connected with the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and suspected of being involved in the USS COLE bombing in 2000. Osama bin Laden receives assistance from other terrorist groups and several governments. While many successful intelligence operations at the strategic and operational levels are kept

⁵ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 198-199.

secret, unsuccessful intelligence operations at these same levels are often revealed and scrutinized in an effort to prevent subsequent unfavorable outcomes.

There are different types of intelligence failures in terms of ramifications and whether an intelligence failure is categorized as a surprise attack, technological surprise, or a foreign policy disaster. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 by the Japanese is a classic intelligence failure. This case revealed that there was too much information—“noise” drowned out the “signals,” bureaucracy problems for processing and disseminating information/intelligence, and analytical flaws of “mirror imaging” as well as underestimating Japanese capabilities.

The Soviet launching of Sputnik in 1957 made it appear that the U.S. was behind the Soviet Union in a technological race. In contrast, the Sputnik case was not an intelligence surprise since a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in 1956 had predicted a Soviet capability to launch a satellite during 1957.⁶ Here, U.S. policymakers failed to anticipate public panic of a Soviet technological lead. Lack of anticipating a potential public displeasure with the Soviet’s recent technological edge would have presented an intelligence dilemma of whether the public should have been prepared for the Soviet launching of Sputnik at the expense of exposing some intelligence sources and methods. Foreign policy relations between the U.S. and Iran from 1978-1979 was a major disaster and an intelligence failure. Assessment of this case revealed that collection was poor. There were policy restrictions imposed on collection of opposition groups.

⁶ Mark M. Lowenthal, “The Burdensome Concept of Failure,” in *Intelligence Policy and Process*, eds. Alfred C. Maurer, Marion D. Tunstall, and James M. Keagle (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 45.

Analytical flaws were also evident in overestimating support for the Shah and underestimating the degree of dissatisfaction with the regime. Finally, there was “wishful thinking” on the part of policymakers for a strong Barzagan government as well as politicization of analyses with policy preferences.

Although there are numerous case studies to choose from for this monograph, the Easter Offensive in Vietnam in 1971 and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait in 1990 are sufficient case studies. Both of these case studies contain a multitude of variables that contribute to military intelligence failures and show how the defeat of a combat organization can result from such failures. Furthermore, the threats in each of these case studies are similar to what today’s military forces can encounter. For the Easter Offensive case study, military intelligence failures occurred on a battlefield with characteristics such as a complex spectrum of threats, asymmetric and symmetric; availability of technical and human collection assets, and leadership involvement in the analysis and use of intelligence. The nature of military intelligence failures in the Iraqi-Kuwait case study resulted from reliance of knowledgeable technologies and policy decisions that impact intelligence operations.

In the 21st century with the availability of high-level knowledge resources, *are military intelligence failures inevitable?* If so, what are the causes and effects of intelligence failures and how can these causes and effects be mitigated or minimized in order to contain the degree of ramifications? In order to address these questions, first, what is the definition of intelligence and secondly, what constitutes an intelligence failure?

According to FM 101-5-1: MCRP 5-2A, intelligence is: (1) the product resulting from the collection, processing, integration, analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of available information concerning foreign countries or areas; and (2) information and knowledge about an adversary obtained through observation, investigation, analysis, or understanding. The author offers that the definition for a military intelligence failure is the inability of one or more steps of the intelligence cycle to produce timely, accurate, and relevant intelligence on an issue or event of importance to military strategy—art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of national policy by the application of force or the threat of force.

FM 101-5-1: MCRP 5-2A also defines the intelligence cycle as the steps by which information is converted into intelligence and made available to users. There are five steps in the cycle: (1) planning and direction—determination of intelligence requirements, preparation of a collection plan, issuance of orders and requests to information collection agencies, and a continuous check on the productivity of collection agencies; (2) collection—acquisition of information and the provision of this information to processing and/or production elements; (3) processing—conversion of collected information into a form suitable to the production of intelligence; (4) production—conversion of information into intelligence through the integration, analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of all source data and the preparation of intelligence products in support of known or anticipated user requirements; and (5) dissemination—conveyance of intelligence to users in a suitable form. Other variables that may be linked to intelligence failures are the organizational structure and the relation between policymakers/decisionmakers and intelligence professionals.

Numerous authors have assessed that intelligence failures are inevitable because intelligence will never be perfect nor can all surprises be eradicated since intelligence rarely deals in absolutes or certainties. Richard K. Betts, renowned expert on military strategy and military intelligence, concluded in his article “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures are Inevitable,” published in 1978 that the remedy for intelligence failures is having tolerance for disaster.⁷ Again, this study will explore if this assessment is still valid. It is imperative that considerable thoughts be applied to the problem of military intelligence failures in order to prevent unfavorable military operations. This topic should be revisited occasionally to provide a “fresh look” and uncover any new information on how to eliminate military intelligence failures or at a minimum, reduce the effects of consequences for such failures. Ultimately, the challenge of eliminating or minimizing the effects of intelligence failures is to prevent surprise in order to afford policymakers/decisionmakers the time required to devise a plan that could effectively counter impending threats, with the goal of least cost to lives and treasure.

⁷ Richard K. Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable.” *World Politics* Vol. 31, no. 2 (October 1978): 89.

CHAPTER 2

THE EASTER OFFENSIVE IN 1972

In the great majority of cases, defeat can usually be traced back to a lack of knowledge of the enemy. Whether from overconfidence, ignorance, gullibility or just a failure to comprehend the facts, military defeat is almost invariably associated with an intelligence defeat.

—Colonel John Hughes-Wilson⁸

At noon on Good Friday, 30 March 1972, North Vietnam conducted the largest conventional offensive operation into South Vietnam. This massive offensive is known as the Easter Offensive, Summer Offensive, or the Nguyen Hue Offensive. The Communists called this operation the Nguyen Hue Offensive because of its historical significance for all Vietnamese. Nguyen Hue was the birth name of Emperor Quang Trung, the great Vietnamese ruler who in 1789 marched his army through the jungles and mountains of central Vietnam to the outskirts of Hanoi where he surprised and defeated a Chinese occupation force.⁹ Nguyen Hue's victory ended China's rule over Vietnam of more than a thousand years and united the country.

⁸ COL John Hughes-Wilson, *Military Intelligence Blunders* (New York, NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1999), 3.

⁹ Dale Andrade, *Trial by Fire* (New York, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1995), 45.

The Easter Offensive was launched in three successive waves, attacking three of the four military regions in South Vietnam. Figure 1 shows the military regions.

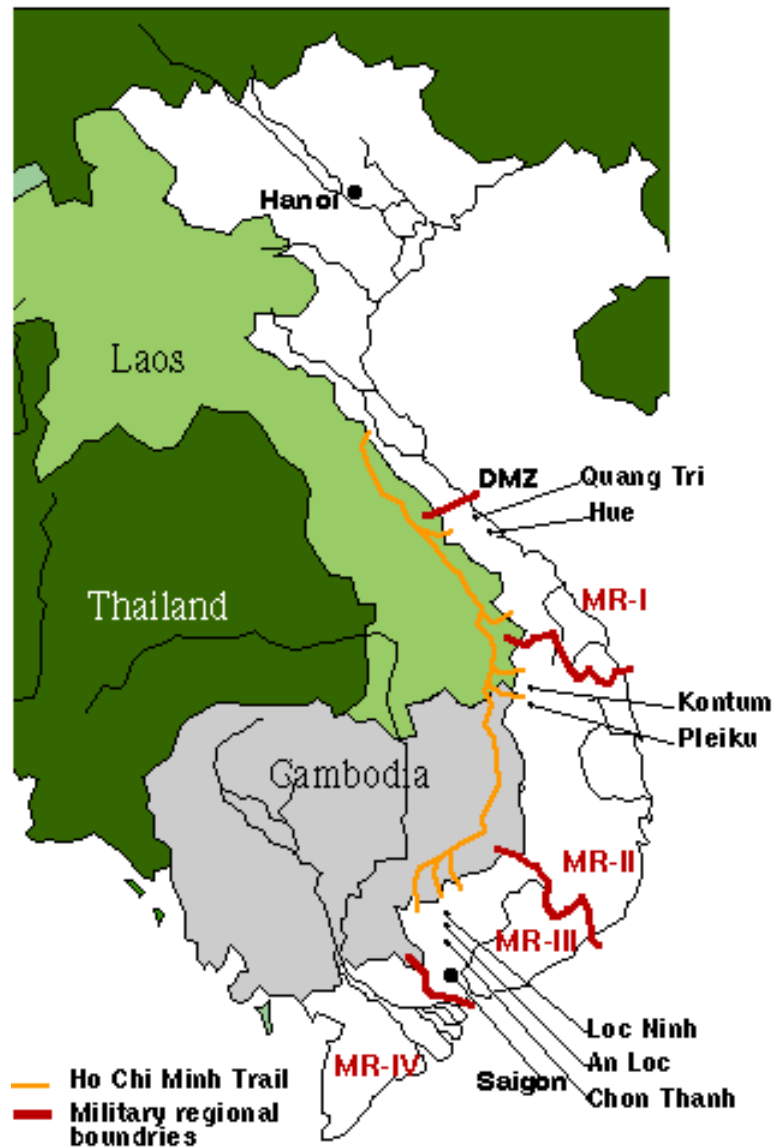


Figure 1. Military Regions

Source: Walter J. Boyne, "The Easter Halt," p.3; available from <http://www.afa.org/magazine/0998easter.html>; Internet; accessed 11/15/00.

Heavy artillery barrages preceded the invading force in which consisted of fourteen regular divisions and twenty-six regiments with supporting armor and artillery units as well as mobile antiaircraft artillery and surface to air missile batteries. The North Vietnamese committed at least 120,000 regulars and thousands of Vietcong guerillas. They were equipped with more than 600 T-54, T-55, and the amphibious PT-76 tanks. Artillery units included 130mm and 152mm artillery pieces as well as the 160mm mortars. The T-54 tanks and 130mm howitzers were potent arsenals in the Soviet inventory. Antiaircraft systems consisted of 23mm, 37mm, 57mm, 85mm, and 100mm guns. Surface to air missiles comprised of SA-2s and SA-7s. This was the first time that the Communists were noted to have the deadly heat seeking, man-portable SA-7 missiles. The North Vietnamese outnumbered the South Vietnamese in tanks and long-range artillery systems. They also had a significant antiaircraft capability in the South for the first time. Communist forces lacked only ground attack aircrafts to support their troops.

The first wave was against Military Region (MR) I with more than 40,000 communist forces crossing the demilitarized zone (DMZ) as well as moving eastward from camps in Laos. By 1 May 1972, the Communists captured the northern fire bases and Quang Tri City and were reorganizing to attack Hue. Hue is an ancient imperial capital city as well as a cultural center of Vietnam for learning and remembrance of the traditions and values of the past. Its collapse under communist control would have profound psychological effects on the Vietnamese. The second wave took place three days later with approximately 20,000 communist troops moving out of Laotian and Cambodian sanctuaries into MR-II to attack the major cities of Kontum and Pleiku. Here, the Communists cut off and surrounded Kontum with the intent of cutting off

Pleiku and splitting Vietnam in half. Kontum was sustained through a massive resupply effort. The third and final phase involved at least 30,000 communist forces moving from Cambodian sanctuaries to attack An Loc and Loc Ninh in MR-III with the intent of a quick victory that would lead them down Highway 13 toward Saigon.

At the commencement of the Easter Offensive, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) had assumed the primary responsibility for the ground war. American troop withdrawals were taking place in accordance with the American policy of Vietnamization. This policy enabled the U.S. to pull its combat troops out of Vietnam by transferring responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese—Nixon’s strategy for an honorable exit. At this time, only 6,000 of the 70,000 thousand Americans remaining in Vietnam were combat troops compared to 540,000 troops at the height of the war in 1968.¹⁰ The U.S. combat units in Vietnam were all committed to the defense and security of U.S. bases and installations. There were about 102 Air Force fighters in South Vietnam (64 F-4s, 15 A-1s, and 23 A37s), supplemented by 15 AC-119 gunships.¹¹ Americans primarily provided advice, logistics, and combat support.

Although the Saigon regime had more than a million men under arms, about half were regulars and the remaining were in local units, they were still stretched thin in order to comply with their defense strategy. The RVNAF was expected to secure every piece of national territory at all cost, regardless of the size and location of the area. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) during the Easter Offensive had its divisions evenly distributed north to south throughout the four military regions. Each region had three

¹⁰ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1983), 642, 682.

¹¹ Walter J. Boyne, “The Easter Halt,” p.4; <http://www.afa.org/magazine/0998easter.html>; Internet; accessed 11/15/00.

divisions with the exception of MR-II. This region had two divisions with a Korean force on its eastern seaboard. The National Reserve, Airborne, and Marine Divisions were under the control of the Joint General Staff (JGS). The Airborne Division was around the Saigon area. The Marine Division was dispersed between their main base areas at Vung Tau and Bien Hoa, with a brigade-sized detachment in MR-I.

North Vietnam's decision to conduct a major conventional offensive was believed to be based on a number of objectives: (1) hoped to influence the 1972 U.S. presidential elections, upset the tempo of Nixon's Vietnamization, and hasten the withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam; (2) intended to demonstrate to the Soviet Union and China that North Vietnam was still a credible fighting machine as well as undermine the increasing cooperation between both communist giants and the United States; (3) wanted to reverse the advances made by Saigon's pacification program, which had been increasingly effective during the years since the 1968 Tet Offensive; and (4) wanted to alter the military balance in South Vietnam.¹²

Americans often viewed a Communist push into Vietnam as a "go-for-broke" operation in an attempt to gain a quick, decisive action. Instead, the Hanoi regime viewed the Easter Offensive as another engagement in a series of attempts that would eventually change the situation to their favor. Vo Nguyen Giap, chief Communist Strategist, emphasized his regime's long-term outlook in an interview during the offensive: "The battle that will decide the future of our people began more than twenty-five years ago. A battle, no matter how important it may be, whether I Chou or Hastings,

¹² Andrade, 43.

Philippi or Belle-Alliance, can only represent the high point of a developing situation.”¹³

North Vietnam’s assessment was that the defeat of the ARVN would weaken Vietnamization and simultaneously strengthen its position at the ongoing Paris Peace talks. Basically, Hanoi wanted to demonstrate to the U.S. that the only way for an honorable exit of American troops was to negotiate on its terms. Pham Van Dong, North Vietnam’s Prime Minister, publicly stated that it was necessary to prove the failure of Vietnamization to prove to Nixon that “he has everything to lose except the honorable exit we are determined to enable him to make.”¹⁴

The Easter Offensive finally ended with the Paris agreement of 27 January 1973. Communist forces were eventually defeated by a stubborn South Vietnamese defense coupled with overwhelming U.S. air power and ground advisory support. After a month of fighting, the Communists controlled Quang Tri city as well as areas north of Binh Long and west of Kontum. The cities of An Loc and Kontum were under heavy attack. Three months after the outbreak of the invasion, the ARVN launched a successful counteroffensive with U.S. tactical air and naval gunfire support. The ARVN counteroffensive successfully halted the North Vietnamese invasion on all major fronts and succeeded in recovering part of the lost territory, including the provincial capital of Quang Tri.¹⁵

U.S. air power (tactical air support, including Army helicopters and B-52 bombers) prevented the massing of many communist forces, damaged communist support

¹³ Karnow, 639.

¹⁴ Ibid, 642.

¹⁵ LTG Ngo Quang Truong, *The Easter Offensive of 1972* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1977), 13.

activities, provided logistics/medical support to many ARVN forces and the local population at sieged locations, and helped sustain the morale of the ARVN soldiers. Additionally, air power assisted in the recapture of Quang Tri City and enabled the ground forces to hold at Kontum and An Loc. On 8 May, American involvement was expanded when President Nixon ordered the extensive bombing of North Vietnam and mining of Haiphong harbor—OPERATION Linebacker I. During the Easter Offensive, the U.S. Air Force and Navy effectively demonstrated their global mobility and power. Bases from Thailand, Guam, Korea, Phillippine, and U.S. flowed additional aircrafts and crews into Southeast Asia. Fighters increased to 400, B-52 bombers rose to 171, tankers increased to 168, and the number of carriers rose to 6.¹⁶ From March to May, B-52 sorties increased from 600 to 2,223 while fighter strike sorties, including the South Vietnamese air force rose from 4,237 in March to 18,444 in May and sustained at 15,951 in June.¹⁷

The U.S. advisory effort was another critical factor to the success of RVNAF. The role of American advisors was to assist the Vietnamese staffs in planning and supervising combat operations as well as developing procedures for the effective use and coordination of tactical air, naval gunfire, and artillery. In many instances, American advisors stayed with their South Vietnamese counterparts and shared their fate on a daily basis. The presence of American advisors during the Offensive provided moral support and represented American resolve. American advisors also coordinated the employment of U.S. tactical aircrafts and helicopters that were supporting their unit. LTC(R) James Willbank, an American advisor during the Battle of An Loc, stated in his study *Thiet*

¹⁶ Boyne, 5.

¹⁷ Ibid, 5.

Giap! The Battle of An Loc, April 1972: “The advisers provided the link between the ARVN defenders and the American tactical aircraft and helicopter supporting the battle. Without the advisers and their radios, the defenders on the ground in the city and surrounding area would have been unable to talk to the aircraft. The advisers were tireless in coordinating the around-the-clock air strikes that prevented the North Vietnamese forces from overrunning the city.”¹⁸

Prior to the Paris agreement of 27 January 1973 (cease-fire agreement), both the North and South Vietnamese forces were trying to hold as much territory as possible in South Vietnam in anticipation of a “leopard spot” arrangement (October 1972), also known as the “standstill cease-fire.” Furthermore, Nixon ordered the commencement of Operation Linebacker II on 18 December 1972 for 11 days, excluding Christmas day. This was another extensive bombing operation against North Vietnam with the aim to force Hanoi back to the negotiation table. North Vietnam suspended the negotiations on 13 December 1972 when Nguyen Van Thieu, President of South Vietnam, did not agree with the draft October 1972 cease-fire agreement proposed by North Vietnam and the U.S. The South Vietnamese government perceived this agreement to be a potential disaster since it left 13 North Vietnamese Army divisions and 75 regiments in South Vietnam, totaling at least 160,000 troops.¹⁹

The peace agreement of 27 January 1973 hardly differed from the October draft;

¹⁸ LTC James H. Willbanks, USA, Ret., *Thiet Giap! The Battle of An Loc, April 1972* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1993), 68.

¹⁹ Harry G. Summers, Jr., *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 182.

however, President Thieu was induced to agree with it since President Nixon promised to retaliate with swift and severe actions if the agreement was broken. This promise proved to be empty words. Unlike the Geneva agreement of 1954 which required the Communists to consolidate in the north, this peace accord authorized both the northern and southern forces to remain in the areas of the south that they controlled. Nixon, felt that this peace plan permitted the U.S. the opportunity to finally achieve peace with honor in Vietnam. In the plan, the U.S. agreed to take its troops and planes out of Vietnam and North Vietnam agreed to release American prisoners of war. South Vietnamese casualties at the end of the Easter Offensive were 8,000 killed in action (KIA), about 24,000 wounded, and nearly 3,500 missing while the North Vietnamese suffered more than 100,000 casualties with at least 40,000 KIA and also lost more than half of their tanks and heavy artillery.²⁰ It took North Vietnam three years to recover in manpower and material resources before she could conduct another major offensive. When Hanoi regained the strength to conduct another major offensive, the outcome was the fall of South Vietnam on 30 April 1975.

There were contrasting perspectives on the effectiveness of intelligence with regard to the forecasting of the Easter Offensive. From a positive perspective, Secretary of the Army, Stan Resor, stated: "With this better intelligence, General Abrams has been able to make more effective use, first, of the air power and then, secondly, of the forces we have there."²¹ Conversely, some American and South Vietnamese commanders as well as some top administration officials in Washington appeared surprised with the

²⁰ Lewis Sorley, *A Better War* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999), 339.

²¹ Ibid, 340.

magnitude and scope of the Easter Offensive, despite advance intelligence that they had received. Five weeks before the Offensive, Secretary of Defense Laird told members of Congress that nationwide North Vietnamese and Vietcong assaults were “not a serious possibility.”²² General Westmoreland, Army Chief of Staff, assessed the Communist drive fading “in a matter of days” because “the staying power of the enemy is not great.”²³

There were general questions that were asked of all intelligence agencies each year: *is Hanoi planning a major offensive and if so, what was its likely intensity?* A number of key indicators have been associated with these questions: (1) latest resolution adopted by the Politburo of the Labor (Communist) Party; (2) official trips overseas by key governmental or Party officials to seek aid and resulting increases in aid from the Communist Bloc; (3) appearance of modern weapons; (4) reorganization or activation of command and control systems; (5) advance test of a certain form of tactical maneuver to be employed in the offensive campaign; (6) intensive indoctrination or special study sessions held in units; (7) visits made by high ranking military delegations from countries giving aid; (8) decreasing rate of returnees (ralliers); and (9) movement of reserve units into the battlefield.²⁴ North Vietnamese logistical trends and infiltration levels, particularly along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, were also key indicators of an impending offensive.

There were numerous sources available in 1972 to detect these indicators and the following examples are not inclusive: technical intelligence capabilities such as infrared

²² Karnow, 641.

²³ Ibid, 641.

²⁴ COL Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Intelligence* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1984), 236-237.

photography; moving target indicators; sensors that respond to heat, sound, and vibrations; interception of radio and phone traffic; agents; prisoner of war interrogations; captured document analysis; studies of enemy losses; and open sources, including propaganda publications authored by communist officials as general policy statements. Indications of the Easter Offensive were first detected in December 1971. Some evidence included an imagery that showed a concentration of armor near South Vietnam, new North Vietnamese units on the Ho Chi Mihn Trail moving into South Vietnam, and an unnumbered policy resolution provided by a reliable agent. This policy resolution outlined the key missions of North Vietnamese forces which were agreed upon by the politburo in December 1971. Essentially, Hanoi had planned to transition from a protracted war to a conventional war.

Convinced of an impending major offensive based on available intelligence, General Creighton W. Abrams, commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), warned Washington on 16 January 1972 of an impending major military effort by the North in South Vietnam during the weeks ahead.²⁵ Most intelligence agencies concurred with this assessment. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates assessed that a major enemy campaign would commence soon in South Vietnam. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) forwarded a similar assessment to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in early January 1972. Colonel Peter F.C. Armstrong, a U.S. Marine Corps officer, briefed the Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and a gathering of the military's highest brass that the North Vietnamese had planned a major offensive during the 1972 dry

²⁵ Andrade, 27.

season and that they would make wide use of armor.²⁶

Many military and civilian officials were unconvinced of an impending enemy offensive, despite the available intelligence data. In late January, Laird ignored the intelligence warnings when he reported to Congress that a large Communist Offensive “was not a serious possibility” because local Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam were too disorganized.²⁷ At the Pentagon, General Westmoreland, Army Chief of Staff, held a press conference stating that although some sort of enemy offensive was likely, “the logistics are limited to the point where he will have to reduce the magnitude of his offensive in a matter of days.”²⁸

Within Vietnam, there were also different interpretations of the evidence. LTG Hoang Xuan Lam, Commander of I Corps in MR-I, and BG Vu Van Giai, commander of 3rd Division in MR-I, were alerted in January and February 1972 by intelligence reports from Saigon of a big enemy offensive into their area of operations during the Tet holiday. This information was obtained from instructions that were passed from the High Command Hanoi to subordinate headquarters. Hanoi did not conduct the Offensive during the Tet holiday. This reinforced doubts among the disbelievers of the occurrence of a major offensive. Late in March 1972, however, information was obtained by J-7 of the JGS that 29 March would be the D-day of the general offensive and this information was disseminated to all ARVN units as a measure of precaution.²⁹

Enemy avenues of approach into MR-1 were also under much debate. Some

²⁶ Ibid, 27.

²⁷ Ibid, 28.

²⁸ Ibid, 28.

²⁹ Ibid, 155.

analysts assessed that communist forces would approach MR-I from the north across the DMZ as well as from the usual approach in the west. At least one enemy division and two regiments were unaccounted for during February 1972. These unlocated units were believed to be north of the DMZ. Conversely, some analysts and military commanders assessed that the enemy would only move into MR-I from the approach in the west because crossing the DMZ would be a blatant violation of the Geneva Accords.

Although there was evidence of the Communists preparing for a major, general Offensive, most Allied commanders were confident that the Communists could not sustain an offensive immediately after Tet. South Vietnamese Generals Lam and Giai were not convinced that the Communists would attack from the north, and across the DMZ for a number of reasons: (1) this avenue of approach was mostly flat, open terrain that were unfavorable for maneuvering large infantry formations even with armor support and (2) deliberate deployments in this area would be detectable; therefore, can be countered with friendly tactical air, artillery, armored forces, and existing strongpoints.³⁰ On the eve of the Easter Offensive, I Corps continued to believe that “Massed enemy formations remain vulnerable to detection and subsequent attack by TAC air, B-52 strikes, artillery bombardment and combat air assault.”³¹

Despite the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) alert of 29 March as D-day for the North Vietnamese invasion, BG Giai proceeded in rotating two regiments on 30 March 1972 as part of his unit rotation program. The purpose of this program was to familiarize the troops with the terrain and eliminate the stationary fire base syndrome that

³⁰ Truong, 22-23.

³¹ Andrade 30.

U.S. forces had practiced in South Vietnam. After BG Giai ordered the regiments to execute this difficult transition, he and his staff did not supervise the operation. BG Giai and his U.S. senior advisor also had planned to fly to Saigon for the holiday weekend.

Allied commanders' misinterpretation on the likeliness, scope, and duration of the Offensive could also be attributed to the fact that they ignored available data from human intelligence (HUMINT) and overly relied on technical intelligence disciplines such as imagery intelligence (IMINT) and signals intelligence (SIGINT).³² Based on agent reports, the 1st Battalion (Provisional), 525th MI Group, constructed a detailed description of the major North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units, their commanding officers, and the date the Offensive was to begin and disseminated it to the 525th MI Group, MACV, U.S. Army, Vietnam (USARV) and 7th Air Force Headquarters, First Regional Assistance Command (FRAC), naval intelligence liaison, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, 1st MIBARS (MI Battalion, Aerial Reconnaissance Squadron), CIA, and U.S. Army Special Forces in the Da Nang area.³³

In conclusion, military intelligence did not fail in collecting and disseminating information on the Easter Offensive of 1972. There was, however, different interpretations and misinterpretation of available intelligence. Intelligence analysts, policymakers, and military leaders held different assessments on the possible avenues of approaches into MR-1 and/or the timeline and scope of the Offensive. Some senior policymakers and military commanders were not convinced that Hanoi had the resources

³² W.R. Baker, W.R., "The Easter Offensive of 1972: A Failure to Use Intelligence," p.6; <http://huachuca-usaic.army.mil/mipb/easterof/BAKERfml.html>; Internet; accessed 11/15/00. Accessed 11/15/00.

³³ Ibid, 6.

to conduct and sustain a major, general offensive into South Vietnam, despite the intelligence warnings.

The misinterpretation of the intelligence evidence resulted from a combination of things. First, the U.S. and its Allies did not fully understand Hanoi's intentions. North Vietnam was willing to wage a war with no regard to costs and sacrifices of personnel and material resources. Hanoi's aim was to turn the tide of the war in its favor. North Vietnam was prepared to lose the tactical battles and win at the strategic level for a united Vietnam under its control—persevere longer than U.S. commitment to South Vietnam. Secondly, there were South Vietnamese leaders and intelligence analysts who were victims of the mirror-imaging syndrome because they were convinced that the Communists would not attack across the DMZ since this action would have violated the Geneva Accords. Unlike the U.S. and its Allies, the North Vietnamese were not compelled to adhere to the Geneva Accords.

The interpretation of the evidence should not result from over-reliance of any one particular intelligence discipline, but rather, based on information derived from all of the intelligence disciplines—all-source intelligence. Analysis based on all-source intelligence would have provided a more accurate picture of the situation and would have reduced self-deception. There is nothing wrong with having different interpretations of the same evidence. In fact, this is healthy because it addresses many if not all of the potential possibilities of threat courses of action. The misinterpretation of evidence from lacking all-source analysis and from ignoring intelligence warnings can cause unfavorable results. Additionally, policymakers and military leaders should not blame

intelligence agencies when they ignore intelligence warnings, especially when their action or inaction is the basis of disastrous consequences.

CHAPTER 3

IRAQI INVASION OF KUWAIT IN 1990

*In order to influence the future we have to understand the present. The present will always reflect human nature, where greed and thirst for land or power, the battle for resources—oil, water or minerals—and the unrelenting lust for conquest still lie deep in the psyche of the powerful. These catalysts for conflict remain unchanging in all ages and all societies. Only by knowledge of the present and the past can we control the future. **Intelligence is our warning mechanism against future Saddams. Not just their capabilities: their intentions too.***

—Colonel John Hughes-Wilson³⁴

At about 2 a.m. Baghdad time on 2 August 1990, Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait with three Republican Guard heavy divisions supported by combat aircraft and a helicopter-borne Special Forces air assault on Kuwait City. Figure 2 shows the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. One division moved down a coastal road to Kuwait City, a second division seized the inland oil fields, and the third division moved toward the Saudi Arabian border. Iraqi forces quickly overwhelmed the Kuwaiti forces, capturing Kuwait City and the Emir's palace on the same day of the invasion. The Kuwaiti ruler, Sheik Jaber al-ahmed al-Sabah, escaped to Saudi Arabia and established a government in exile. The remainder of Kuwait was overrun on the following day. By 6 August, there were nearly

³⁴ COL John Hughes-Wilson, *Military Intelligence Blunders* (New York, NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1999), 352.

11 combat divisions in Kuwait. On 8 August, Saddam Hussein, President of Iraq, proclaimed annexation of Kuwait.

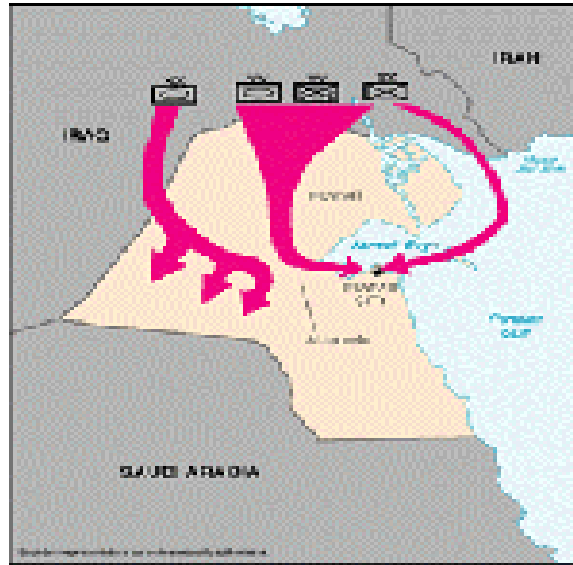


Figure 2. Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait

Source: Rick Francona, "Special: The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, August 2, 1990," p. 2; available from http://www.i5ive.com/article.cfm/middle_east/44530; Internet; accessed 2/23/01.

There were sufficient Iraqi forces along the Kuwait-Saudi border that could have easily attacked Saudi Arabia and overwhelmed its military forces with little or no warning. Between Iraq and Kuwait, Saddam controlled about 20 percent of the world's oil reserves. If Saddam had conducted a successful attack against Saudi Arabia, he would have controlled over 40 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and much of the

world's oil refining capability as well as closed off the most likely debarkation points for any foreign forces entering Saudi Arabia.³⁵ Furthermore, a successful attack against Saudi Arabia could have led to a subsequent invasion of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), enabling Saddam to have a major influence over the world's oil. The world community almost universally condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The United Nation (UN) responded by demanding an unconditional withdrawal by 15 January 1991 and imposed a strict trade embargo.

Before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Saddam was confronted with an economic catastrophe. He was trying to rebuild Iraq after 8 years of war with Iran, to include his military programs in which consisted largely of weapons from other nations. During the war with Iran from 1980-1988, Iraq had borrowed about 50 billion dollars from other Arab states and western banks, of which 15 billion was from Kuwait.³⁶ Saddam took his country to war against Iran to protect his position and prevent the import of Islamic fundamentalism. In fact, Saddam believed that Iraq had been fighting the Khomeini regime to protect all of the Arab states from Iranian Shiite fundamentalism, especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia based on their proximity to Iran; therefore, Iraq should not have to repay her war debts. Saddam also wanted the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to reduce its oil production so that Iraq may recoup the war costs by selling more oil. At the Arab Summit in Baghdad in May 1990, Saddam said to his guests, "for every single dollar off the price of a barrel oil...Iraq loses a billion dollars a

³⁵ Rick Francona, "Special: The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait, August 2, 1990," p.2; available from http://www.i5ive.com/article.cfm/middle_east/44530; Internet; accessed 2/23/01.

³⁶ Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia 2000 Deluxe, 1999 ed., s.v. "Persian Gulf War," by COL Douglas L. Moquin, USAF (Ret.).

year.”³⁷

Not only did the other OPEC members refused this request but also, both Kuwait and the UAE were driving the price of oil down by increasing their own production. Saddam believed that Kuwait was the primary culprit of this oil ploy. Since Saddam could no longer hope for additional oil revenues or cancellation of his debts, he resorted to threats. His assessment of the decision by Kuwait and the UAE to increase their oil production was a violation of quota agreements and a declaration of economic war on Iraq. To ensure that there was no misunderstanding among his Arab brothers of his intentions, Saddam further stated at the meeting, “War is fought with soldiers...but it is also done with economic means. Therefore we would ask our Arab brothers who do not wish to make war on Iraq—this is in fact a kind of war against Iraq. I believe our brothers are fully aware of our situation...but we have now reached the stage where we can no longer withstand this pressure.”³⁸

There were a number of motives behind Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait: (1) Iraq could not repay the war debts and Kuwait would not cancel the loans to Iraq; (2) Kuwaitis were incredibly rich with huge investments abroad in which Iraq’s access to this wealth could resolve its financial problems; (3) alleged Kuwaiti oil drilling in the Rumaila oil field, which lay in disputed territory; (4) Kuwaiti and the UAE overproduction of oil resulted in under pricing and cost Iraq 14 billion in oil revenue; and (5) Emir of Kuwait declined Saddam’s request for a face-to-face peace talks and expressed preference for an Arab

³⁷ Hughes-Wilson, 318.

³⁸ Ibid, 318.

League mediation instead.³⁹ Saddam also targeted Kuwait because he wanted to possess two islands that were owned by Kuwait to give Iraq better access to the Gulf.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Kuwait was a friend of the West and Saddam believed that much of the Arab world resented this and would support his demands.

Saddam had miscalculated on how both the Arab states and the international community would retaliate to his decisions on the invasion and annexation of Kuwait. After the invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia immediately requested for American assistance. President Bush responded on 7 August with the deployment of American air, ground, and naval forces to Saudi Arabia. An international coalition led by the U.S. was also formed to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The U.S. along with the international community was united in their diplomatic and military efforts against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. They were prepared to pay the cost of war (Persian Gulf War) with their time, effort, equipment, and even casualties in order to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi aggression.

The military strategy against Iraq was a four-phased operation in which included both an air campaign and a ground campaign: (1) phase I—conduct strategic air campaign; (2) phase II—establish air superiority; (3) phase III—attack on the Republican Guard and other Iraqi army forces; and (4) phase IV—conduct ground offensive supported by air and naval forces. The air campaign against Iraq's centers of gravity overwhelmed the Iraqis and affected their ability to recover and resist, particularly during the rapid ground offensive. The decisive operation during the ground assault was based

³⁹ Bruce W. Watson and Bruce W. Watson, Jr., "The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait," *Military Lessons of the Gulf War* (Presidio Press, CA: Greenhill Books, 1991), 15.

⁴⁰ Michael Coffey, *Military Blunders* (New York, NY: Nugus/Martin Productions Limited, 1999), 264.

on a "left-hook" from the west while bringing the Coalition forces directly onto the Republican Guard forces (Saddam's strategic reserve). Shaping operations involved an amphibious feint and fixing attacks along the Kuwaiti-Saudi border. The Gulf War had the necessary manpower and material resources to attain its objectives. Each phase had a measure of merit before transitioning to the next phase. The success of the final phase resulted in conflict termination. The Coalition effectively cut off and destroyed Iraq's army in Kuwait and its ability to threaten regional peace and stability.

By the end of the Gulf War, nearly 50 countries had contributed. Many countries helped financially, including billions in economic aid to countries that were primarily affected by the crisis. Some countries provided valuable in-kind assistance such as construction equipment, computers, heavy equipment transporters, chemical detection vehicles, food, fuel, water, airlift, and sealift. At least 38 countries deployed air, sea, or ground forces. These countries committed more than 200,000 troops, more than 60 warships, 750 aircraft, and 1,200 tanks.⁴¹ The U.S. committed approximately 539,000 personnel. There were approximately 545,000 Iraqi troops in or around Kuwait. At least 15,000 Iraqis were killed and 30,000 wounded and less than 223 coalition soldiers were killed and 697 wounded.⁴²

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait appeared to have surprised the Arab world, the U.S., and the international community. In the fall of 1989, a secret National Intelligence Estimate representing the assessments of all the U.S. intelligence agencies, including the DIA and CIA, concluded that, while Saddam wished to dominate the Gulf region, he was

⁴¹ *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Congressional Record, 1992), 23.

⁴² Hughes-Wilson, 337.

unlikely to employ his military to do so because the eight-year war had so severely strained the country's economy.⁴³ Colonel Said Mata, who was in the Kuwaiti Army and a military attaché to Iraq before the war, reported as early as April 1990 of an Iraqi military operation. On 2 July, he forecasted that an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait would take place on 2 August.⁴⁴ This analysis was based on numerous sources corroborated with informants in the Republican Guard. Everyone in Kuwait ignored Mata's warning of an invasion. Kuwaiti army officers and the minister of planning successfully silenced Mata while he was talking to the press. It was not until 1 August that both the CIA and DIA reported that there would be an imminent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with all the indicators present.

The Arab states ignored Saddam's threats because they believed that Saddam was bluffing and was using his threats as a bargaining chip. Additionally, it was unprecedented for an Arab state to attack another Arab state. The Arab countries were also confident that the crisis with Saddam could be resolved internally among them without western intervention. On 25 July, Saddam summoned April Glaspie, U.S. ambassador to Iraq and a career diplomat, to discuss his intentions as well as obtain insights on U.S. intentions toward Iraq. Glaspie expressed to Saddam, "we have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts like your border disagreement with Kuwait."⁴⁵

Saddam told Glaspie that he had agreed to talks with the Kuwaitis and that President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt would be the mediator. Before this meeting, the U.S.

⁴³ Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1991), 186.

⁴⁴ Gerald W. Hopple, "Indications and Warning (I&W) and Intelligence Lessons," *Military Lessons of the Gulf War* (Presidio Press, CA: Greenhill Books, 1991), 146.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 191.

was sending mixed policy signals to Iraq. Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, the cause of the fall of the U.S. supported Shah government, America had been supporting Iraq in order to promote a balance of power in the region. In the 1980s, the U.S. and other Western nations provided extensive military support to Iraq, especially during the Iran-Iraq war. In 1984, the American Congress approved the “tilt to Iraq” policy and removed Iraq from the list of countries that were sponsoring terrorism.

By the mid 1980s, the U.S. was giving Iraq free trade credits of at least half a billion dollars to buy 150,000 tons of American rice. Before Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait, President Bush strongly denounced Saddam’s threats against his neighbors while his administration simultaneously blocked congressional efforts to impose economic sanctions on Iraq or cut U.S. food assistance. The mixed messages that the U.S. was sending to Iraq probably helped Saddam formulate his flawed analysis of American resolve to help defend Kuwait. After the meeting with Saddam, Glaspie cabled the State Department with a positive assessment: “[Saddam’s] emphasis that he wants a peaceful settlement is surely sincere.”⁴⁶ Glaspie reinstated her holiday plans since Saddam reassured her that the crisis between U.S. and Iraq was over. Saddam did suggest that negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait were still possible.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait also surprised the western community. Although throughout 1990, U.S intelligence systems were tracking Iraqi capabilities, it was not until 30 July that Saddam’s intentions were clear to Walter P. Lang, a DIA intelligence officer as well as the senior Pentagon intelligence civilian for the Middle East and South Asia. On 30 July, Lang emailed the DIA director, LTG Harry Soyster, and the other division heads within the agency that Saddam was not bluffing on invading Kuwait. The

⁴⁶ Hughes-Wilson, 334.

basis of this assessment was the disposition of 100,000 Iraqi troops along the Kuwaiti border and Saddam's personality profile of not knowing how to bluff.⁴⁷ Saddam had created the capability to overrun all of Kuwait and all of Eastern Saudi Arabia with no warning.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, no one believed Lang's assessment. Soyster was not convinced of Lang's assessment because he did not think that in today's world, a country would invade another country for territory. General Colin Powell, Joint Chief of Staff, also dismissed Lang's assessment, but on the basis, that it was just an educated guess.

Powell had been monitoring the flow of information on Iraq and had not seen the four indicators normally associated with a field army when it is conducting an attack: (1) communications networks were not in place—intercepts showed the traffic levels were too low for an invasion; (2) artillery stocks were not in place for offensive action; (3) other needed munitions were not there; and (4) there was an insufficient logistics “tail”—supply lines—capable of supporting attacks by armored tank forces.⁴⁹ By 27 July, President Mubarak had sent a personal message to President Bush, repeating his forecast of no imminent trouble and cautioning the U.S. to stop both saying and doing things to try to influence the situation and to let the Arabs handle it.⁵⁰ Powell also had been reassured of stability in the region during a six days visit in early July of Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, and Israel. During this visit, the heads of state and other senior officials downplayed the prospect of hostilities in the Middle East in the near future.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Woodward, 196

⁴⁸ Ibid, 196-197.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 192.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 195.

⁵¹ Ibid 187.

Although Powell was unconvinced of an invasion at this time, he was concerned about the military being able to effectively respond to a Middle East crisis. After all, Saddam had himself declared as President for Life by the powerless legislature. Additionally, by 19 July, there were more than 35,000 men from three divisions within 10-30 miles of the Kuwaiti border. To ensure that the military would be prepared to respond effectively to a Middle East crisis, Powell initiated preliminary planning steps by having General Schwarzkopf, Commander of the U.S. Central Command, begin developing options for a contingency in the Middle East. Once Lang received new evidence of an Iraqi invasion on 1 August, he produced a top-secret, highest-priority flash warning message describing the situation and forecasting an Iraqi attack that night or the next morning. Once Powell read both the CIA and DIA assessments with the presence of all the indicators of an Iraqi attack, he believed it. There was evidence that Saddam had moved his tanks on line overnight along with the communications, artillery, munitions, logistics, and airpower.

In conclusion, there was misinterpretation of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait up to the day before the invasion. Unarguably, Iraq had the capabilities to overrun Kuwait but Saddam had effectively masked his intentions to invade Kuwait to most policymakers, decisionmakers, and intelligence analysts until 1 August. There was evidence and focus on Iraqi capabilities as opposed to Iraqi intentions. This resulted from an abundance of technical intelligence systems and the lack of good human sources in the Iraqi government. Additionally, collection and analysis of capabilities are simpler than collection and analysis of intentions. Threat capabilities are quantifiable, measurable, tangible, and are easier to assess. In contrast, threat intentions are not measurable or

tangible and are harder to assess. There is also no guarantee of success with HUMINT operations since human nature is unpredictable and can change without a basis of rationale.

Mr. Hughes-Wilson noted in his book, *Military Intelligence Blunders*, that there were at least two key times in which the intelligence community should have known of Saddam's intentions: (1) Saddam's explicitly stated at the Arab summit in Baghdad in May of his demands and the consequences if his demands were not satisfied and (2) NSA allegedly intercepted an Iraqi diplomatic assessment that listed America's track record of "inactivity and passivity."—Cyprus 1974 as well as the Chinese in Tibet and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.⁵² There must be equal focus on collection of capabilities and intentions in order to distinguish between the "signals" and the "noises" associated with analysis of information. Saddam had attempted on a number of occasions to create "noises" by subduing his threats against his neighbors. He mentioned, "Iraq does not want war, we have fought for eight long years and we know what war means." He also deceived many people by agreeing to talks with Kuwait and having Mubarak as the mediator. These deceptive actions would have been unsuccessful if Saddam's intentions were accurately interpreted as well as Saddam was accurately perceived as a dictator who was conscientious about loss of face and public image.

If the U.S. had viewed Saddam as the person that he really was, then the assessment of Saddam would have been consistent with the following characterization of him by a British intelligence officer who specialized in the Middle East.

⁵² Hughes-Wilson, 318, 335.

Saddam was a good old-fashioned Arab dictator. Everyone knew what he was and what he was capable of. He was devious, untrustworthy, greedy, ambitious and scared shitless of being topped in yet another Iraqi coup, just like so many of his predecessors. He came out of the Iran war broke, paranoid and desperate. He was also terrified of plots—after all, his own people did have about three goes at assassinating him in the seven months before he invaded Kuwait. To think that a psychotic dictator with 5,000 tanks is going to sit back alongside a defenceless neighbour, that just happens to be one of the richest countries in the world, while they stick two fingers up and tell him to push off because he's not getting any of their money, is just plain stupid. Especially when the US Ambassador says that it doesn't matter if he robs the bank. Anyone who's studied the region for any length of time could have taken bets on him trying his luck. It was a simple intelligence matter of capabilities and intentions, and knowing your man. In the circumstances, what else was Saddam Hussein to do?⁵³

Finally, the U.S. national policy toward Iraq was also out of date. This resulted in tolerating and not taking Saddam's threats seriously as well as creating a politicized intelligence process. Consequently, America's desire for power of balance in the region, especially against Iran, led to dismissing evidence that Saddam was an increasing threat to the stability and security of the Middle East.

⁵³ Ibid, 341-342.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Intelligence failures are not only inevitable, they are natural...they are no more common and no less excusable than academic errors. They are less forgivable only because they are more consequential...survey of intractability of the inadequacy of intelligence, and its inseparability from mistakes in decision, suggests one final conclusion that is perhaps most outrageously fatalistic of all: tolerance for disaster.

—Richard K. Betts⁵⁴

The notion that it is possible to always know what must be known about the threat at the right time and the right place for policy makers and decision makers to take action, even under imperfect conditions is naïve and unrealistic. The reality is that resources are scarce or may be prioritized elsewhere. There is only a finite number of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) systems available for collection worldwide, 24 hours everyday. Additionally, there will never be enough analysts available to interpret every piece of incoming information from all the collection systems. Intelligence failures have also been linked to the probability of error in cognitive skills and the unpredictability of the human dimension—adversary’s intentions, judgement and analysis, and decisionmaking. After all, the human mind can change like the weather or

⁵⁴ Betts, 88-89.

make a decision without necessarily a perceived rationale basis. Finally, policy goals and decisionmakers courses of action prioritize the intelligence efforts.

It is no wonder that Richard Betts, drew the conclusion that there should be tolerance for disaster because of inadequate intelligence and mistakes in decision in his article, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable.”⁵⁵ The genesis of military intelligence failures is often linked to the interpretation of intelligence and how the policymakers and decisionmakers use intelligence. Both the Easter Offensive of 1972 and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 are sufficient case studies for generalizations about military intelligence failures. These case studies effectively addressed the issues and challenges of military intelligence failures and the unfavorable outcome of military operations when such failures exist.

Because of military intelligence failures, Allied forces in Vietnam were surprised when the Easter Offensive began on 30 March 1972 as well as the Kuwaitis along with the international community were surprised of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwaiti on 2 August 1990. Intelligence alone cannot win the battle, but intelligence can certainly cause its defeat. There are a number of lessons that can be deducted from the case studies in this monograph. First, technical collection systems cannot provide all the information required for sound analysis. Good human sources are still viable and essential in complementing technical collection operations. The prudent use of technical and human collection assets can help better understand both the intentions and capabilities of the adversary, contribute to all-source intelligence analysis for current and estimate intelligence, and minimize deception as well as self-deception.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 89.

If information derived from human sources had not been ignored by key leaders and intelligence professionals, but instead was one of the intelligence discipline for all-source analysis, then the Allied forces in Vietnam would have been aware of Hanoi's intentions before the Easter Offensive began. In the Iraq-Kuwait case study, Saddam's intentions before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait were hard to discern with the mixed messages that he was sending compounded with the lack of good human sources in the Iraqi government. Although collection on capabilities has proven to be easier than collection on intentions since capabilities are quantifiable, measurable, and tangible, there must be equal focus of collection on both capabilities and intentions to obtain situation understanding.

Second, there is a much-needed investment on improving intelligence analysis in order to minimize misinterpretation of evidence and educate the analysts on how to deal effectively with uncertainties during a conflict, crisis, and war. Misinterpretation of available evidence was a critical intelligence failure in both case studies and resulted in friendly forces not being prepared against the attacking forces. Intelligence analysis is fundamentally a mental process; therefore, the key to improving it is to improve on how to "think about thinking." This must first start with how to better understand, influence, and guide the mental processes of analysts themselves. Intelligence analysts should think about how they make judgments and reach conclusions.

An invaluable guideline for the analytical process, particularly for the problem of misinterpretation has been provided in Richards Heuer book, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*: (1) define the problem—start out by ensuring that the right questions are asked or ask the right questions; (2) generate hypotheses—identify all plausible hypotheses even if there is currently no evidence to support them and suspend judgment for as long

as possible until all the ideas have been presented; (3) collect information—do not rely on only information delivered through official channels but also seek information directly from the collectors, other analysts, academic specialists, foreign newspapers, and specialized journals in order to solve as many analytical problems as possible; (4) evaluate hypotheses—focus on developing arguments against each hypothesis rather than trying to confirm hypotheses and allow the facts to emerge on their own merit for objectivity; (5) select the most likely hypothesis—proceed by trying to reject hypotheses rather than confirm them and understand the evidence and arguments for the most likely hypotheses as well as why the other hypotheses were rejected or less likely; and (6) ongoing monitoring—understand that the environment is dynamic and analytical conclusions are always tentative; therefore, consider how new information fits the current and alternative hypotheses.⁵⁶

Some recommendations to help enhance analytical excellence include (1) support for research on better understanding of the cognitive processes in making intelligence judgments and how cognitive limitations affect intelligence analysis and how to minimize their impact; (2) allocate training time to the thinking and reasoning processes involved in making intelligence judgments—use an experienced coach who can monitor and guide ongoing performance; (3) expose alternative mind-sets by ensuring that well-reasoned competing views have the opportunity to surface within the intelligence organizations; and (4) guide analytical products by identifying alternatives that were considered, justifying why the alternatives are deemed less likely, and clearly expressing the degree

⁵⁶ Richards J. Heuer, Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*,” pp. 1-4; available from <http://odci.gov/csi/books/19104/art17.html>; Internet; accessed 1/14/01.

of likelihood that events may not turn out as expected—prevent single-minded focus on what is probably happening or most likely will happen.⁵⁷

Third, the relation between intelligence leaders/analysts and policymakers/decisionmakers is paramount to the analysis process as well as how the analysis is used. Intelligence analysis should be free from politicization. The objective is not to provide subjective analysis to support a policy or succumb to pressure in order to produce a judgment that supports the organization's view. The charter of intelligence analysts is to provide objective analysis to the policymakers/decisionmakers for action. Once an analyst self-politicizes his analysis, he risks losing his credibility and being perceived as incapable of providing objective analysis. Policymakers/decisionmakers expect frank responses from analysts to help them determine how to avoid setbacks and advance their goals.

In both case studies, the Vietnamization policy and the “tilt to Iraq” policy, promoted a sense of “wishful thinking” among key leaders that the threat situation was manageable. Consequently, threat courses of action were misinterpreted. Although an analyst must understand the intent of policymakers and decisionmakers in order to ensure that his work is relevant, he must learn how to do it without self-politicizing his analysis. Remedies for politicization include (1) being conscientious that the purpose of the analytical product is not to support a particular policy or organizational view; (2) ensuring that all evidence are weighted equally to present plausible alternative scenarios; and (3) conferring with colleagues to ensure that the analytical product is objective.

Finally, the organizational climate does have an impact on many if not all of the

⁵⁷ Ibid,4-7.

variables that contribute to military intelligence failures. Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization*, offers valuable insights for a learning organization in which appears to be the model organizational structure for intelligence organizations and organizations that use intelligence. Senge defines a learning organization as an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future and is not only a tool for evolution of organizations, but for evolution of intelligence.⁵⁸ A learning organization embraces adaptive learning (survival learning) and generative learning techniques in order to enhance a capacity to create. Additionally, Senge believes that there must be systems thinking approach within a learning organization. Meaning that there must be a discipline for seeing wholes, the interrelationships among variables, and patterns of change rather than static “snapshots.” Ultimately, a learning organization promotes open communications and information sharing as well as creates a culture in which the members are responsible for their performance and growth.

The author offers the following principles/guidelines as further efforts to minimize the effects of intelligence failures in order to provide an objective analytical product for the policymakers/decision to effectively plan against impending threats:

DOs:

- ◇ Rapidly process and share all indicators/intelligence, even sensitive, among the intelligence organizations
- ◇ Avoid self-deception: work to breakdown policy maker, decision maker, and analyst self-deception
- ◇ Analyze from perspective of adversary (get inside the adversary’s head)

⁵⁸ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 14.

- ◇ Analyze risk and adversary's willingness to accept risk
- ◇ Analyze for deception
- ◇ Base assessment on all-source intelligence
- ◇ Allow events/indications to set the analytical timetable, not guess work or politics
- ◇ Consider intelligence gaps as warning indicators
- ◇ Concentrate on unusual events/anomalies
- ◇ Create indicator lists, including critical indicator
- ◇ Provide analysis, don't report all indications
- ◇ Do qualitative and quantitative analysis of capabilities
- ◇ Consider all relevant sources, even contradictory ones
- ◇ Get policymakers/decisionmakers to consider "what ifs"/consequences
- ◇ Follow current intelligence for estimate intelligence, but don't rely only on current intelligence for estimate intelligence
- ◇ Provide clear, concise warning based on majority assessment/view
- ◇ Strive for consensus in assessment
- ◇ Understand decisionmakers may be wedded to preconceived ideas/policies; present "what ifs"
- ◇ Create simple tracking system for indicators
- ◇ Maintain open mind on assessment
- ◇ Provide assessment in a manner/format, including face-to-face presentations easy for policymakers/decisionmakers to understand and use
- ◇ Reallocate analytical resources for long-term basic research
- ◇ Seek balance in current reporting and in-depth analysis of cumulative indications
- ◇ Focus intelligence analysis on evidence of intelligence collection
- ◇ Focus equally on both capabilities and intentions
- ◇ Seek advocate for assessment at decision maker level
- ◇ Solve organizational/territorial/prerogative issues early
- ◇ Network within intelligence and warning communities
- ◇ Network at the junior policy maker/decision maker level
- ◇ Understand policymaker policies/views/biases to tailor effective assessment
- ◇ Create a "devil's advocate" in intelligence organization for alternate views
- ◇ Persuade policymakers/decisionmakers that intelligence analysis is valuable and necessary
- ◇ Convince policymakers/decisionmakers that they will be at a disadvantage within bureaucracy and foreign challengers if they do not have /understand intelligence analysis
- ◇ Policymakers/decisionmakers should provide guidance
- ◇ Organize to meet demands of warning
- ◇ Strive for consensus assessment
- ◇ Promote open current/estimate intelligence reporting
- ◇ Disseminate warning widely at all levels
- ◇ Warn repeatedly: reinforce warning at each level of echelon--strategic warning with operational and operational with tactical
- ◇ Communicate warning forcefully and well.

- ◇ Present assessment in a way that stimulate response
- ◇ Ensure assessment is delivered to policy maker/decision maker and understood
- ◇ Warn early, warn strongly
- ◇ Seek balance in being safe and right

DON'Ts:

- ◇ Don't let policymakers/decisionmakers stay wedded to preconceived ideas
- ◇ Don't expect adversary to be a rational actor (U.S. view of rational)
- ◇ Don't become conditioned/anesthetized by continual crisis/habituating/creeping normalcy
- ◇ Don't underestimate the adversary
- ◇ Don't fall prey to clientitis (intelligence professional shouldn't get too close to supporting policy/decisions or will ignore warning indications); analyst taking side of adversary
- ◇ Don't assume that the best case/past history will continue (normal theory)
- ◇ Don't delay assessment for consensus
- ◇ Don't be surprised by surprise
- ◇ Don't let long-standing attitudes get in the way of assessment
- ◇ Don't self-politicize own analysis (analyst needs to challenge pm position when contradictory to existing indicators)
- ◇ Don't over-rely on classified information
- ◇ Don't over-rely on order of battle as "proof"
- ◇ Don't delay assessment waiting for the perfect indicator/positive proof/ smoking gun
- ◇ Don't become over confident that U.S./Allied/Coalition capabilities will deter adversary
- ◇ Don't water down analysis to get consensus
- ◇ Don't become captive of allied intelligence organization's views/rely on host nation

There are a number of implications associated with military intelligence failures.

First, military intelligence failures are inevitable and may be a major factor to the defeat or destruction of a combat unit, resulting in high loss of lives and treasure. Second, although military intelligence failures are inevitable, decisionmakers and intelligence professionals are accountable for exploring alternatives to mitigate or reduce the variables of intelligence failures. The purpose is to prevent surprise and support military operations with objective analysis so that policymakers/decisionmakers can have the time required to develop a plan against threat courses of action. This means reducing the

effects of consequences by minimizing uncertainties (fog of war), eliminating cognitive inhibitors of analysis, as well as maximizing all-source intelligence collection and analysis. Observations hundred of years ago by Sun Tzu and Antoine Henri de Jomini on the contribution of intelligence to support military operations are timeless and remain valid in the 21st century.

Recommendations for follow-on research projects include (1) comparing and contrasting how the services are training their intelligence professionals and identifying the most efficient and effective techniques for training analysts; (2) identifying training programs that promote intelligence analyst and policymaker/decisionmaker interaction and assessing the effectiveness of such programs; and (3) determining whether the Intelligence Community is a learning organization.

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